

### On Narcotism by the Inhalation of Vapours by John Snow MD

A facsimile edition with an introductory essay by  
Richard H Ellis 112 pp £20.00  
ISBN 1-85315-158-0

London: Royal Society of Medicine Services, 1991  
Those with an interest in the history of anaesthesia will undoubtedly be, if not familiar, at least acquainted with John Snow's three principal books, 'On the Inhalation of the Vapour of Ether in Surgical Operations', 'On the Mode of Communication of Cholera' and 'On Chloroform and other Anaesthetics'. For these individuals in particular, as well as for many others, the gathering together and publication of Snow's series of articles 'On Narcotism by the Inhalation of Vapours' is a most welcome event.

Richard Ellis, in his erudite and fascinating introduction provides the reader with a valuable insight into the background of these articles as well as including some most interesting biographical perceptions of Snow himself. As he points out, 'The pages of this volume abound with examples of Snow's quite extraordinary foresight, and of his real understanding of the scientific foundations of inhalational anaesthesia. Within four years of its introduction, he had enunciated several of the principles on which anaesthetic practice is still based'.

In reading these articles, one cannot help but be amazed by the depth of thought, knowledge of physiology and sheer ingenuity that enabled Snow to form conclusions and determine values, many of which correspond remarkably accurately with values accepted today.

Dr Ellis deserves both our congratulations and our thanks for making these writings widely available and there is little doubt that this will be a much sought-after volume by those interested in the field as well as providing the more casual reader with an unparalleled insight into the foundations of our specialty.

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### Alzheimer and the Dementias (Eponymists in Medicine Series)

G Berrios and H L Freeman, editors 150 pp  
£12.95 hardback (£7.95 paperback)  
ISBN 1-85315-157-2

London: Royal Society of Medicine Services, 1991  
Half a century ago the catechisms solemnly recited by DPM aspirants included a lengthy list of the causes of dementia. They were divided very simply, as I well remember, into senile and a host of so-called pre-senile varieties, including those bearing the names of Pick, Jacob, Creutzfeldt and Alzheimer, for example.

Nosology in medicine, particularly in psychiatry, never stands still. The classification of my youth is outmoded due in particular to the application of electron microscopy and even more sophisticated technology, such as computed tomography (CT) and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), to neurological and psychiatric disorders.

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